

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 04910

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, NATO. UK
SUBJECT: UK CONSULTATION WITH ALLIES ON FY 78/79
DEFENSE CUTS

REF: USNATO 1614

1. IN OUR GENERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH A NUMBER OF SENIOR
MOD OFFICIALS CONCERNING QUESTION OF CONSULTATION, WE
HAVE CONSISTENTLY PRESSED OUR FRIENDS HERE NOT TO
SHIRK ENGAGEMENT ON THIS ISSUE AND INDEED WE HAVE
ENCOURAGED BRITISH TO CONSULT BOTH BILATERALLY AS WELL
AS MULTILATERALLY THROUGH ALLIANCE MECHANISMS AND
PROCEDURES. ON THE MATTER OF FY 78/79 CUTS OF 230
MILLION POUNDS, MULLEY MADE VERY CLEAR DISTINCTION
BETWEEN HOW FAR UK WAS PREPARED TO GO ON "CONSULTATION"
VIS-A-VIS THE 77/78 CUTS OF 200 MILLION AND THE FOL-
LOWING CUTS FOR 78/79. FROM MULLEY DOWN TO HIS IM-
MEDIATE SENIOR COLLEAGUES, WE HAVE DETECTED NO SIGNAL
THAT MOD INTENDS TO RENEGE ON PROMISE THAT IT WOULD
CONSULT APPROPRIATE NATO AUTHORITIES EARLY IN THE
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GAME ON FY 78/79 CUTS. AS IS WELL KNOWN, BRITISH
HAVE TAKEN LINE EVER SINCE MARCH 75 DEFENSE REVIEW
EXERCISE THAT CONSULTATION FOLLOWS RATHER THAN PRECEDES
THEIR OWN INTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MODALITIES AND
PRIORITIES. HENCE, MOD ARGUES IT MUST DO ITS OWN
HOMEWORK FIRST. AFTER INTERNAL STUDIES ARE COMPLETED
-- BUT WELL BEFORE ANY DECISIONS ARE TAKEN -- MOD WILL

PUT THE DETAILS AND OPTIONS BEFORE IT TO NATO.

2. OBVIOUSLY, BY MAY/JUNE BRITISH WILL HAVE A FEEL FOR WAY THEY WANT TO GO BUT THEY INSIST ALLIES WILL BE ENABLED TO GIVE THEIR VIEWS AND THAT FINAL DECISIONS WILL NOT BE MADE UNTIL VIEWS OF THE APPROPRIATE NATO AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN FULLY CONSIDERED. AT PRESENT, ONLY ONE ELEMENT OF THIS UNFORTUNATE SITUATION APPEARS TO BE ABSOLUTELY FIRM: THAT THE FY 78/79 CUT WILL BE 230 MILLION POUNDS AND THAT IT WILL MATERIALIZE DURING THAT FISCAL YEAR.

3. IN COMMONS ON FIRST DAY OF DEBATE ON DEFENSE ESTIMATES FOR 1977, MULLEY REAFFIRMED AND UNDERScored HMG'S INTENTION TO CONSULT IN GOOD FAITH RE THE 78/79 CUTS.

4. WE AGREE WITH POINT MADE IN REFTel THAT NMAS CAN (AND THEY SHOULD) DO MORE THIS TIME THAN "MERELY ASSESS AND DEPLORE THE CUTS." WO SEC NO REASON WHY, AT THIS EARLY STAGE, WE SHOULD NOT GIVE OUR FRIENDS HERE A NUDGE. WE CONCUR WITH SUGGESTION THAT WE URGE ON MOD PROVISION BY THEM OF UK NATIONAL PLANNING INFORMATION AT EARLIEST PRACTICABLE DATE. BRITISH ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE MAY/JUNE TARGET FOR STUDY COMPLETION AND UK NEED TO HAVE NATO REACTION BY FIRST WEEK IN SEPTEMBER DOES NOT GIVE MUCH TIME FOR FORMAL ALLIANCE REACTION. HOWEVER, UK OFFICIALS INDICATE THEY DO NOT EXPECT THAT SHORTAGE OF STUDY TIME WILL CONSTRAIN NATO

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AUTHORITIES FROM MAKING EVALUATION OF PROVISIONAL UK PROPOSALS TOGETHER WITH UNLOADING REACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5. THE RECORD SHOWS THAT HMG IS CLEARLY VERY SENSITIVE OVER THE ISSUE OF CONSULTATION. WE HAVE HAD IT PUT TO US ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS IN THE PAST THAT THERE IS A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN DISCUSSION AND CONSULTATION -- WITH THE BRITISH EMPHASIZING THAT FORMAL CONSULTATION WAS NOT REALLY REQUIRED OF HMG BECAUSE THEIR DEFENSE CUTS DID NOT CONSTITUTE "UNACCEPTABLE QUANTITATIVE/QUALITATIVE CHANGES" TO NATO CONTRIBUTION. THIS MAY WELL NO LONGER BE TRUE; IF SO GOVERNMENT WILL BE MOST HESITANT TO ADMIT THAT 78/79 CUTS WILL IMPACT DIRECTLY ON UK'S NATO CONTRIBUTION AND HENCE BE CLASSIFIED AS "UNACCEPTABLE . . . CHANGES."

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